

Labor Market Concerns and Support for Immigration

Ingar Haaland¹ Christopher Roth²

¹FAIR–The Choice Lab, NHH Norwegian School of Economics

²Institute on Behavior and Inequality, Bonn

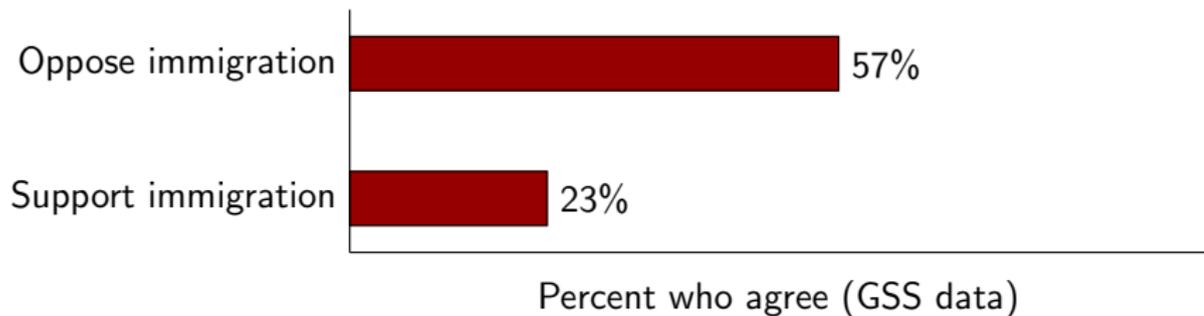
February 1, 2019

Motivation

- Immigration is a heated topic: voters have very polarized views on **immigration policy**.
- Voters are deeply divided in their beliefs about the extent to which immigration is **good or bad for the economy**.

Motivation

Figure: "Immigrants take jobs away from Americans"



Research question

Are **beliefs** about the labor market impact of immigration an important **causal** driver of people's support for immigration?

Identification challenges

Identifying the effect of beliefs on policy views is difficult:

- **Reverse causality** (e.g., people adjust their beliefs to justify their policy views).
- **Omitted variable bias** (e.g., identity politics).

Identification challenges

Identifying the effect of beliefs on policy views is difficult:

- **Reverse causality** (e.g., people adjust their beliefs to justify their policy views).
- **Omitted variable bias** (e.g., identity politics).

⇒ We need **exogenous variation** in beliefs to establish causality.

This paper

This paper

- We conduct a **pre-registered** experiment on a large **representative** sample of Americans (N=3,130).

This paper

- We conduct a **pre-registered** experiment on a large **representative** sample of Americans (N=3,130).
- We **shift beliefs** by exposing treated respondents to research evidence showing no adverse labor market impact of immigration.

This paper

- We conduct a **pre-registered** experiment on a large **representative** sample of Americans (N=3,130).
- We **shift beliefs** by exposing treated respondents to research evidence showing no adverse labor market impact of immigration.
- We measure immigration preferences using both self-reports and **real online petitions**.

This paper

- We conduct a **pre-registered** experiment on a large **representative** sample of Americans (N=3,130).
- We **shift beliefs** by exposing treated respondents to research evidence showing no adverse labor market impact of immigration.
- We measure immigration preferences using both self-reports and **real online petitions**.
- We employ an **obfuscated follow-up** study to test for persistence and to mitigate concerns about experimenter demand effects.

Main results

- Providing research evidence increases people's average support for low-skilled immigration by **0.14 of a standard deviation**.
 - This corresponds to **one quarter** of the gap in policy views between Democrats and Republicans.
 - Treatment effects strongly depend on pre-treatment beliefs.
- Changes in attitudes translate into changes in **political behavior**.
- Treatment effects **persist** in the obfuscated follow-up.

Challenging the consensus

- We challenge the consensus that **labor market concerns are not a quantitatively important driver** of attitudes towards immigration (Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2014).
- We challenge the consensus that **information is not effective** in changing beliefs and policy views.
 - “While perhaps not providing a strict upper bound on the effects of information on preferences, our results do suggest that **most policy preferences are hard to move.**” (Kuziemko et al., 2015)

Outline of talk

Experimental design

Main experimental results

Obfuscated follow-up: design and results

Conclusion

Outline of talk

Experimental design

Main experimental results

Obfuscated follow-up: design and results

Conclusion

Pre-analysis plan

- We submitted a pre-analysis plan to the AEA RCT Registry before we collected any data.
- The pre-analysis plan specified the **sample size** and **how** the data would be **analyzed**.
- The analysis presented today follows the pre-analysis plan.

The Mariel boatlift



“The one historical event that has most shaped how economists view immigration” — Clemens (2017)

The Mariel boatlift: Context

- **Unexpected** mass immigration of Cubans to the US.
- Most of the Cuban immigrants came to Miami, Florida.
- Increased the **low-skilled workforce** in Miami by 20 percent.
- Used by researchers to study the labor market impact of immigration.

Beliefs about labor market impacts I

In the five-year period after 1980, how do you think wages of **low-skilled** [**high-skilled**] workers in Miami were affected by the mass immigration of Cubans?

Beliefs about labor market impacts II

In the five-year period after 1980, how do you think unemployment among **low-skilled** [**high-skilled**] workers in Miami was affected by the mass immigration of Cubans?

Information treatment

NHH



The researchers who analyzed the short- and long-term effects of the mass immigration of Cubans to Miami concluded that, for both high-skilled and low-skilled workers, the mass immigration had **virtually no effect on wages** and **virtually no effect on unemployment**.

According to the researchers, the mass immigration had virtually no effect on wages and unemployment because the new Cuban immigrants increased the overall demand for goods and services, which created more jobs.

Figure: Screen shown to respondents in the treatment group

Self-reported outcomes

Immigrants to the US differ in terms of their professional skill levels as well as their familiarity with American values and traditions.

Do you think the US should allow more or less **low-skilled** [**high-skilled**] immigrants that are **highly familiar** [**not familiar**] with American values and traditions to come and live here?

Behavioral measures: Petition signatures

- We also collect behavioral measures on top of the survey measures.
- We employ **constructed real online petitions** on the White house webpage: <http://petitions.whitehouse.gov/>.
 - H-2B visas are work permits that allow US companies to temporarily hire **low-skilled workers** from abroad for seasonal, non-agricultural jobs, typically for work in restaurants, tourism, or construction.

Intention to sign petitions

Consider the following two petitions and decide whether you would like to sign one of them:

Increase the annual cap on H-2B visas

This petition suggests an increase in the annual cap on H-2B visas from 66,000 to 99,000.

Decrease the annual cap on H-2B visas

This petition suggests a decrease in the annual cap on H-2B visas from 66,000 to 33,000.

Real petition



WE THE PEOPLE ASK THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO CALL ON CONGRESS TO ACT ON AN ISSUE:

Decrease the annual cap on H-2B visas

Created by C.R. on May 31, 2017

This petition suggests a decrease in the annual cap on H-2B visas from 66,000 to 33,000.

 IMMIGRATION



Sign This Petition

Needs **99,941 signatures** by
June 30, 2017 to get a response
from the White House



Sample

- We employ a panel from an online market research company (Research Now).
 - **3130 subjects** that are **representative** of the US population in terms of **age, region, gender, and income.** [▶ Table](#)

Outline of talk

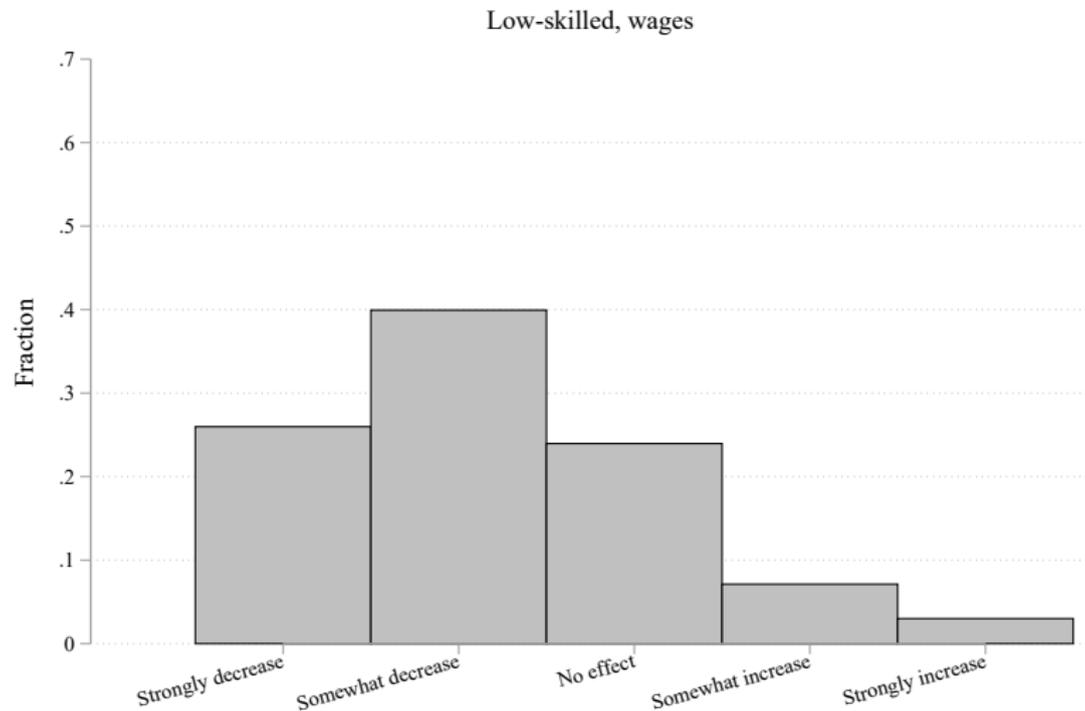
Experimental design

Main experimental results

Obfuscated follow-up: design and results

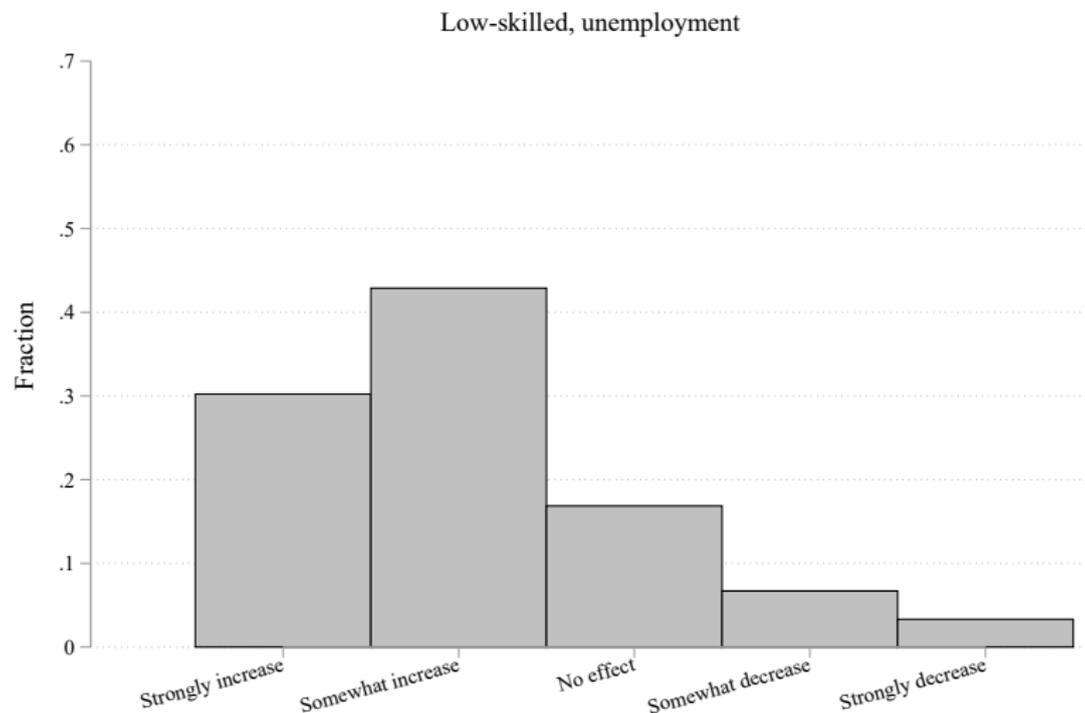
Conclusion

Prior about the Mariel boatlift: Wages



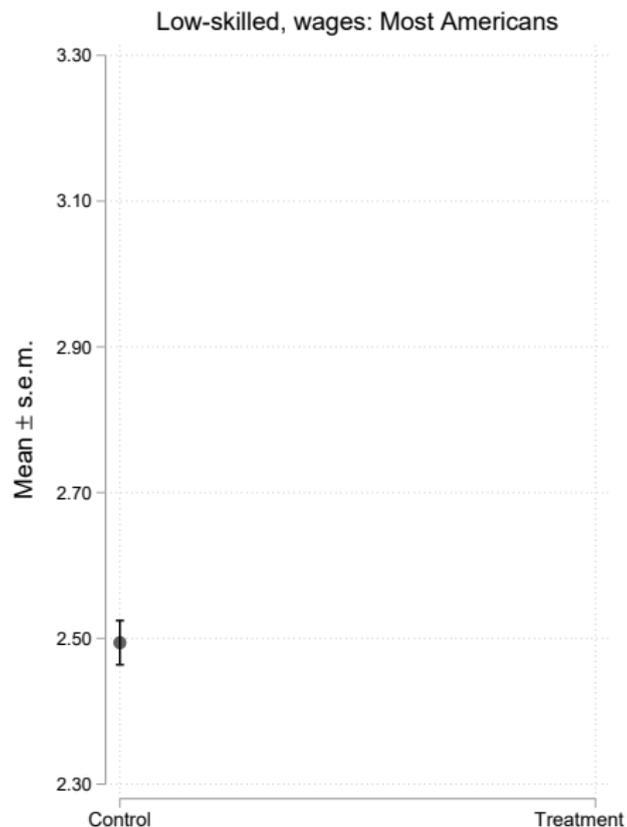
► High-skilled

Prior about the Mariel boatlift: Unemployment

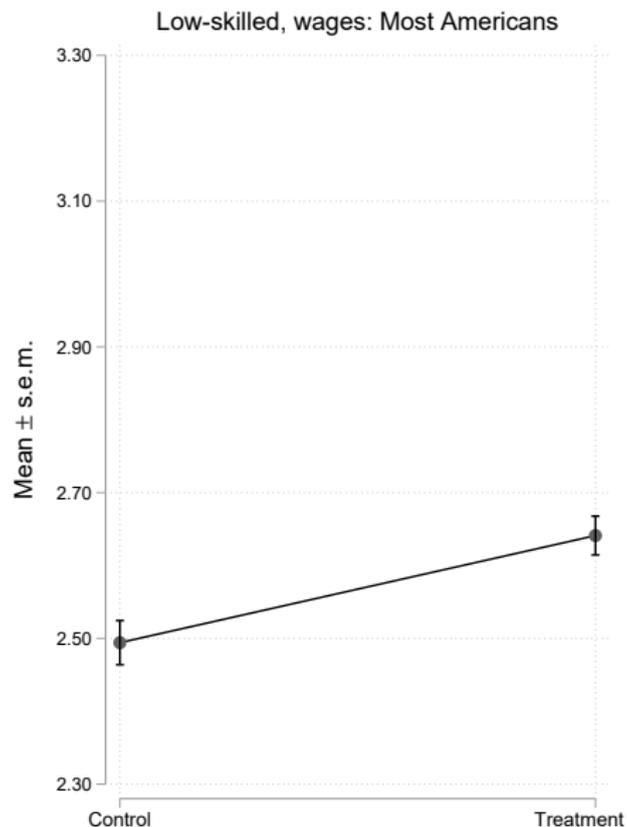


► High-skilled

Do people update their beliefs?



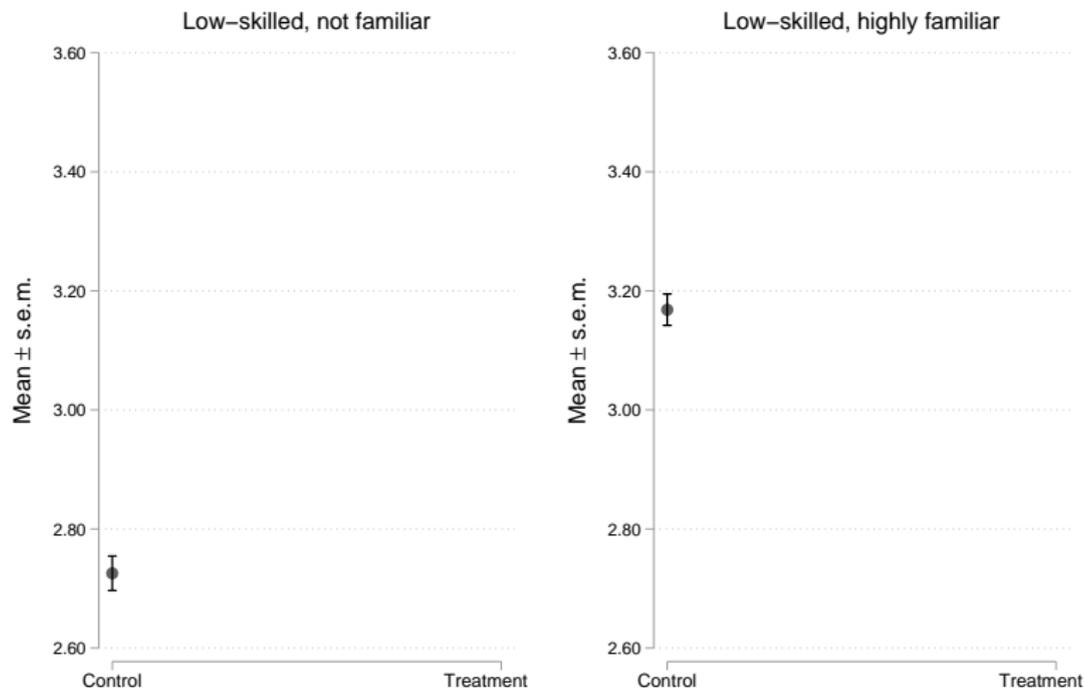
Do people update their beliefs?



Do beliefs causally affect people's attitudes?

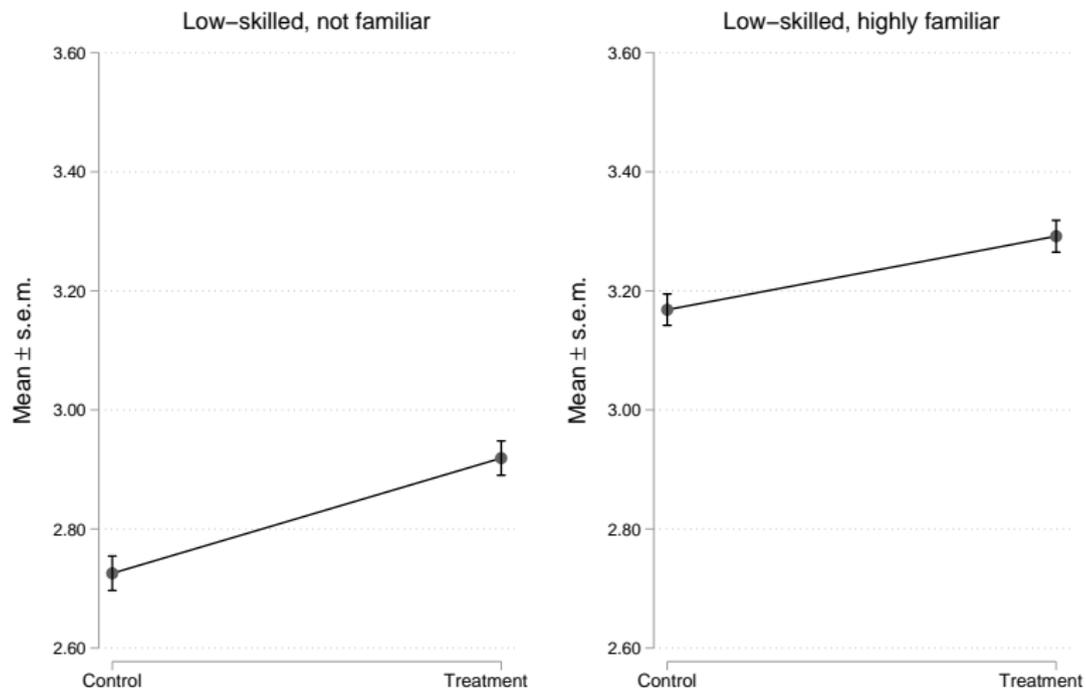
- Treatment successfully created exogenous variation in beliefs about the economic impact of immigration.
- Do beliefs about the economic impact **causally** affect people's support for immigration?

Attitudes towards low-skilled immigration



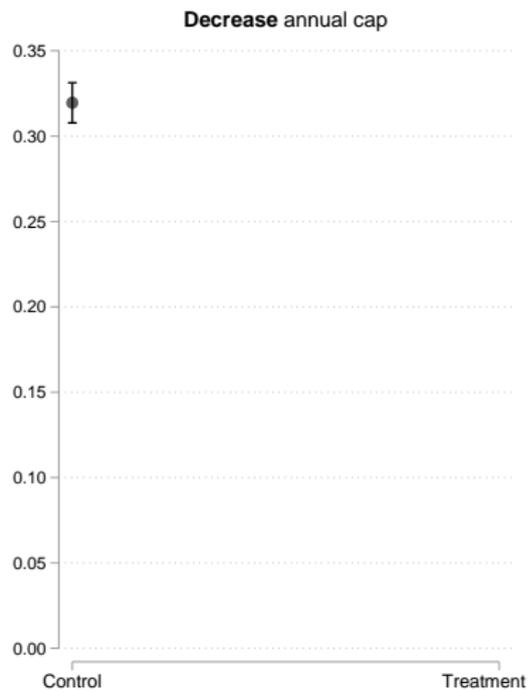
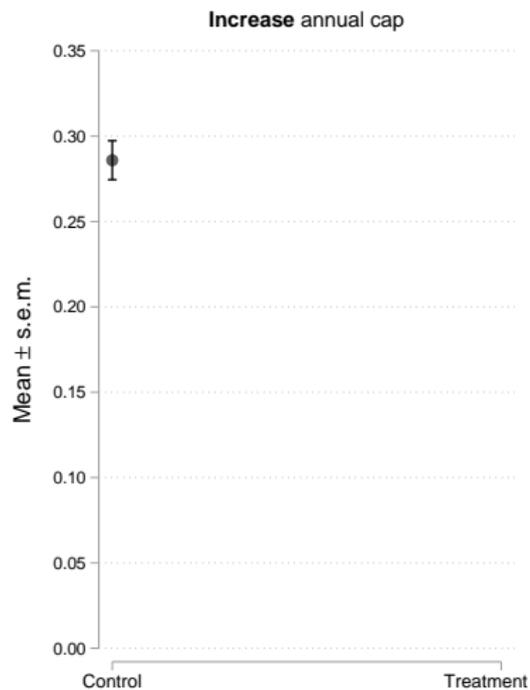
► Figure: high-skilled

Attitudes towards low-skilled immigration

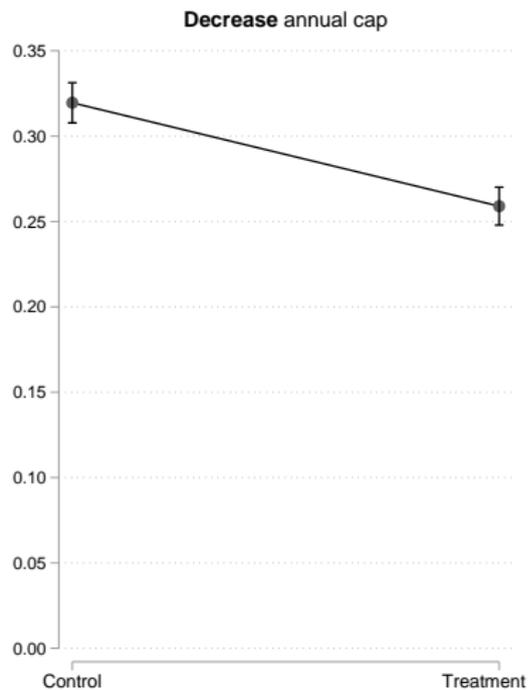
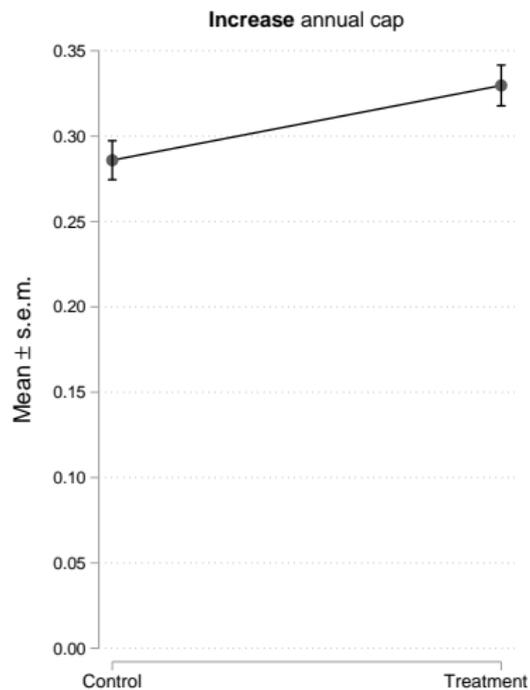


► Figure: high-skilled

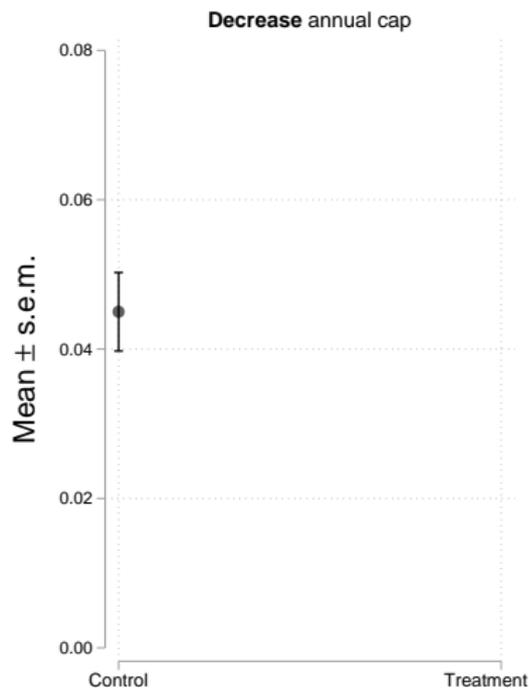
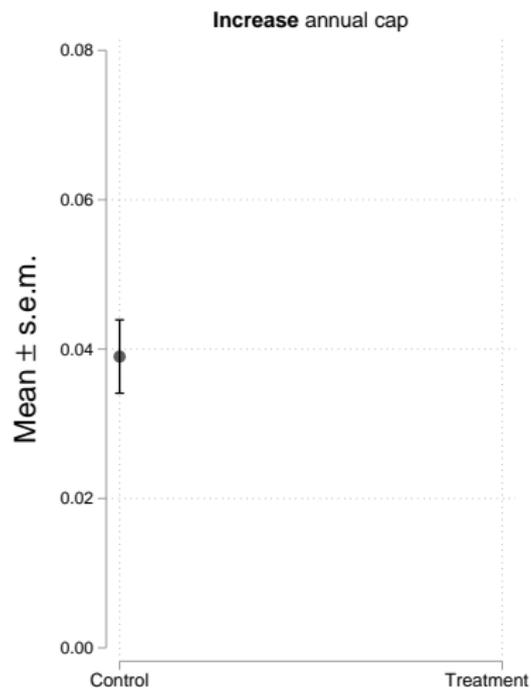
Petitions: Intention to sign



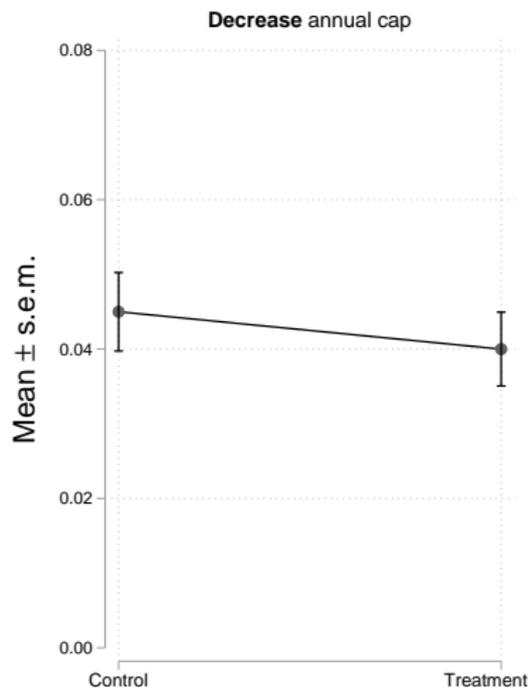
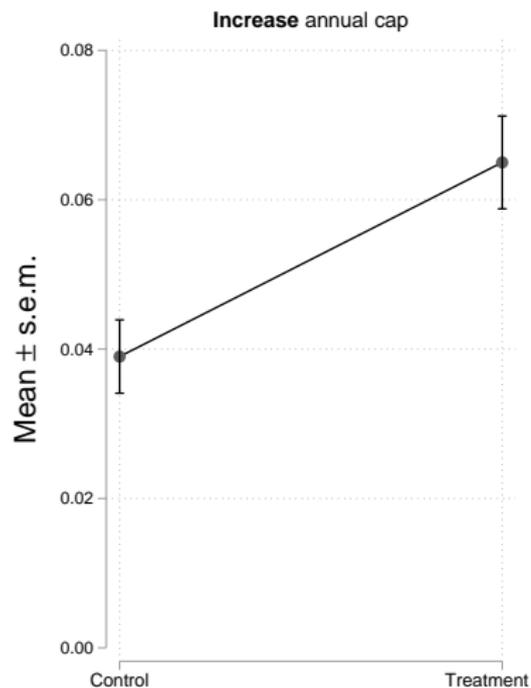
Petitions: Intention to sign



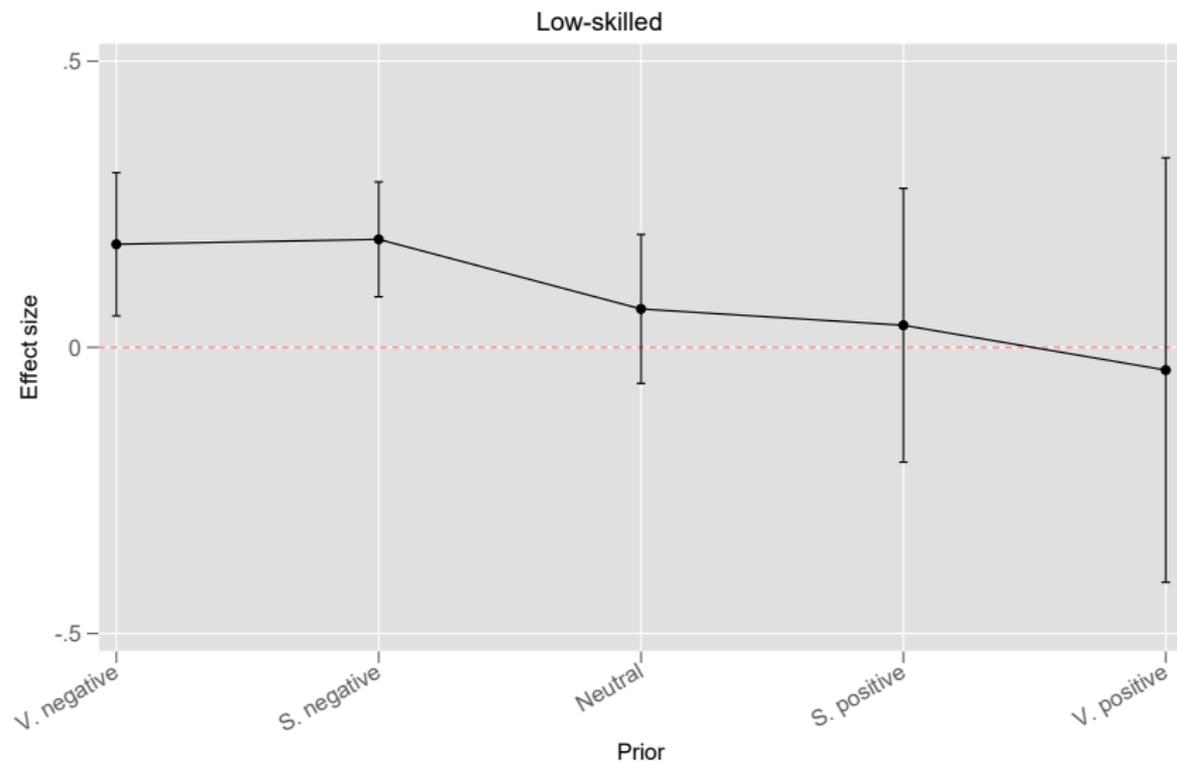
Do changes of intentions translate into changes in behavior?



Do changes of intentions translate into changes in behavior?



Heterogenous treatment effects: Pre-treatment beliefs



Outline of talk

Experimental design

Main experimental results

Obfuscated follow-up: design and results

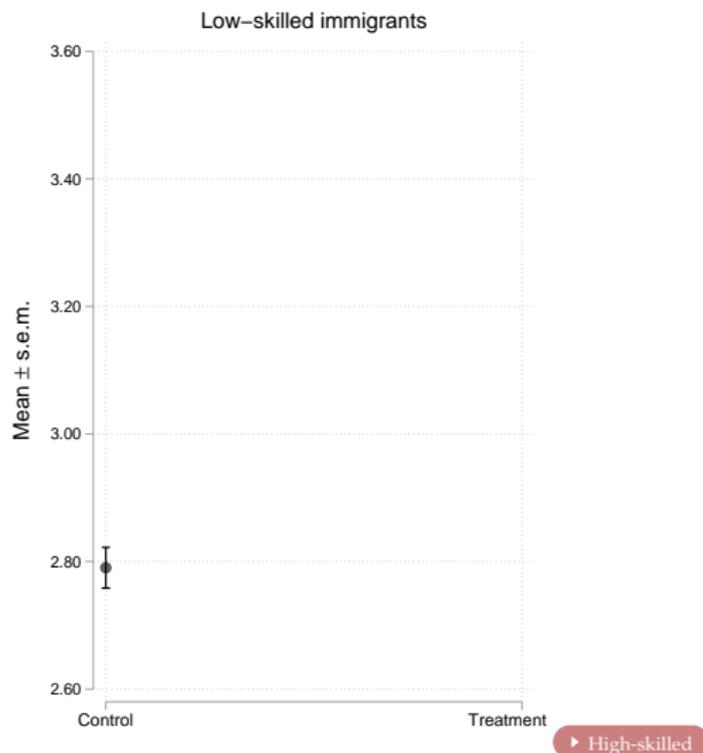
Conclusion

Obfuscated follow-up study

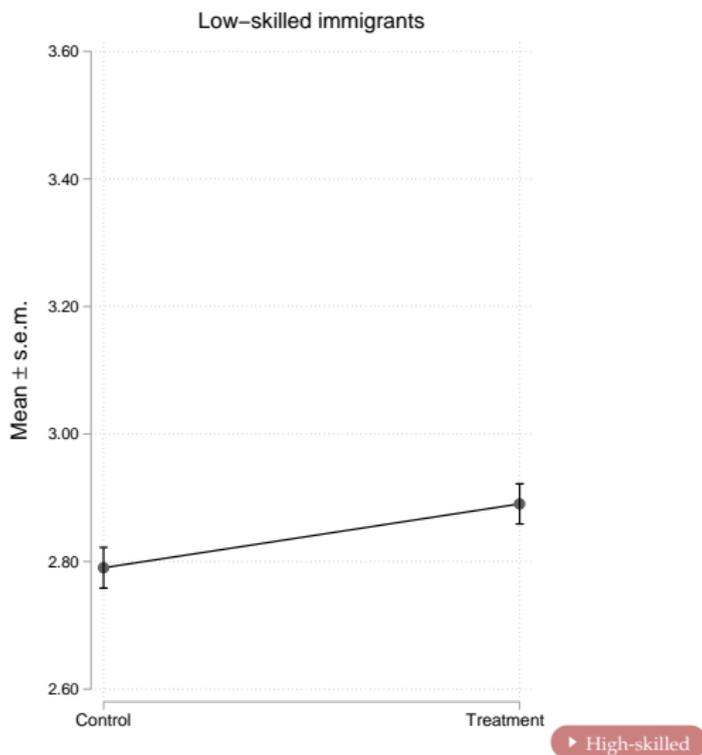
We mitigate concerns about **persistence** and **demand effects** through an **obfuscated follow-up** study:

- Respondents receive generic invitation emails.
- We use different consent forms and layout of surveys. [▶ Consent forms](#)
- We obfuscate the purpose of the follow-up study by first asking questions about other topics (e.g., redistribution, taxation).
- We ask questions about immigration attitudes at the end of the follow-up.

Do changes in attitudes persist?



Do changes in attitudes persist?



Outline of talk

Experimental design

Main experimental results

Obfuscated follow-up: design and results

Conclusion

Conclusion

- Labor market concerns are a **quantitatively important driver** of people's support for immigration.
- Changes in attitudes translate into changes in **political behavior**.
- Treatment effects **persist** in obfuscated follow-up study where concerns about demand effects are mitigated.

References I

- Clemens, Michael A.**, “What the Mariel Boatlift of Cuban Refugees Can Teach Us about the Economics of Immigration: An Explainer and a Revelation,” 2017.
- Hainmueller, Jens and Daniel J Hopkins**, “Public Attitudes Toward Immigration,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, 2014, 17, 225–249.
- Kuziemko, Ilyana, Michael I Norton, Emmanuel Saez, and Stefanie Stantcheva**, “How Elastic are Preferences for Redistribution? Evidence from Randomized Survey Experiments,” *American Economic Review*, 2015, 105 (4), 1478–1508.